

May 12, 1864

Orlestus J. Adams, William B. Neff, and Stephen L. Nichols

Orlestus J. Adams was a 35-year-old 'gentleman;' William B. Neff, an 18-year-old clerk; and Stephen L. Nichols, a 28-year-old farmer in Newton, when they enlisted and died on the same days. On August 13, 1862, these three men enlisted with Mass 32<sup>nd</sup> Company K with 19 other Newton men listed on the Newton Soldiers' Monument with them. All three were killed in action on one of the bloodiest days of the war at "the Bloody Angle" near Laurel Hill, VA on May 12, 1864 in the Battle of the Wilderness. This battle was all the more horrific when ammunition ran out and warfare was conducted hand-to hand and in close range. Their bodies were reportedly never recovered.

Company K was formed by Joseph Cushing Edmands, a Newton native who was a first sergeant in the Mass. 24<sup>th</sup>, and who, after recovering from illness at home in the spring of 1862, formed a new company comprised largely of Newton men. In late summer of 1862, the Mass. 32<sup>nd</sup> was sent to Fort Monroe in Hampton Roads, Virginia. By this time, Edmands had been promoted to Major. From Fort Monroe, they marched to Centreville and fought at the Battle of Bull Run on August 30<sup>th</sup>. The Mass. 32<sup>nd</sup> also fought at Antietam, MD from September 16-17<sup>th</sup>; Blackford's Ford on the 19<sup>th</sup>; and was in Sharpsburg, MD until October 30<sup>th</sup>. From there the regiment moved to Falmouth, Virginia and fought in the Battle of Fredericksburg, which lasted from December 11-15, 1862. The regiment went on to fight in smaller skirmishes and was ultimately sent to fight at Devil's Den in the Battle of Gettysburg in July 1863. Their military careers culminated in Fredericksburg and Spottsylvania, VA.

Orlestus J. Adams was born on April 29, 1827. In 1855, Orlestus appeared in the Boston directory as a salesman at 14 Milk Street. In 1857 Orlestus and his wife Annie lost their 18-year-old son, Frank, to typhoid fever, in Milford, MA. By 1861, Orlestus was living in Newton Corner with his wife Annie and newborn daughter Helen, and commuting to Boston. He also appears in a family history of LaSalle County, Illinois, as the deceased spouse of Annie P. Hathaway, who was born in Freetown, MA. Orlestus J. Adam's cause of death is still under debate, as hospital records reported him suffering from "butt failure," while another source reported his death due to battle wounds incurred at Laurel Hill, VA. It is also unclear as to whether he fought in Gettysburg.

Adams is memorialized on a gravestone at Oak Grove Cemetery in Fall River, MA, with the following inscription: "O.J. Adams, Born April 29, 1827, Killed in the Battle of the Wilderness at Spottsylvania Court House, May 12, 1864." Adams' widow, Annie, was living in Fall River before she died in 1901. His daughter Helen was married in 1881 in Milford, MA. Adams appears alphabetically on the monument and his name was listed there when the monument was dedicated in July 1864.

Two soldiers named William Neff appear in records as serving on the Mass. 32<sup>nd</sup> Regiment Co. K. William B. Neff was born c.1844. According to Sebastian Lizardo, a student researcher at Day Middle School, Neff was born in 1845 in Baden, Wurttemberg, Germany to James and Louise Neff, and came to Massachusetts when he was seven years old. Neff was discharged in 1863, but he re-enlisted in early January, 1864. On May 12, 1864 he was reported missing, and was later recorded as killed in action in a charge on Laurel Hill, Virginia in the Battle of the Wilderness.

Stephen L. Nichols was born in 1831 and may have worked as a farmer in Kingston, New Hampshire as late as 1860. A memorial marker to Nichols stands in Newton Cemetery, with the following inscription: "Fell in Battle of Laurel Hill, Va. He died for his country." Very little else is known about Nichols.

Though Adams' and Nichols' names were listed on the Newton Soldiers' Monument in time for its dedication in July 1864, William B. Neff did not appear on the monument until later. Information found on Neff and Nichols has been limited to military records, but Neff has the distinction of being one of five Newton Civil War soldiers on the Monument for whom we have a photo.

(Sophie Ferreira-Iannone and Sebastian Lizardo, members of the Evergreen Team under Tim Matthews at Day Middle School, contributed to this soldier bio.)